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The Perpetuity of Christ's Church.

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd at

St. MARY'S LEICESTER,

August 20th, 1730.

At the *Triennial Visitation* of the
Right Reverend Father in God,

R I C H A R D,

L O R D B I S H O P O F

L I N C O L N.

By **RICHARD GREY, M. A.** K
Rector of *Kilncote* in *Leicestershire*.

O X F O R D,

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TO THE

Right Reverend Father in God

RICHARD,

LORD BISHOP

OF

LINCOLN,

This SERMON,

Preach'd by his Appointment,

and Publish'd

Obedience to his Command,

As, with the highest Respect,

Dedicated

By his LORDSHIP'S

most Obliged

and most Dutiful

Humble Servant,

R. GREY.



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MATT. XVII¹⁸.

----- *And the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.*



THESE Words were spoken by our Blessed Lord, upon an Extraordinary Occasion, and with a Solemnity suitable to the Importance of it. It was now about a Year or more after the Election of the Apostles, that he thought it convenient to make a particular Trial of their Faith and Understanding, and also to give them a further Light into the Nature and Design of his Mission. He therefore begins with this Question, (a) *Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?* And they said, some say that thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, others Jeremias or one of the

(a) v. 13.

Prophets. He saith unto them, but whom say ye that I am? Ye, who have been my constant Attendants, who have been Witnesses of the Miracle which I have wrought, and in my Name have wrought Miracles Yourselfs, Whom say Ye that I am? And Simon Peter (who generally spake in the Name of the rest of the Apostles) answered and said, Thou art Christ, the Son of the Living God. And Jesus answer'd and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjona; for Flesh and Blood hath not reveal'd it unto thee, but my Father who is in Heaven. And I say also unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock will I build my Church (that City of God) and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. As thy Name is Cephas or Peter which signifies a Rock; so shall this (a) firm and steady Confession of my Messiahship and Divinity be the Rock or Foundation of the Christian Church: in the Belief and Profession of this Fundamental Truth shall subsist a Society to the End of the World, which neither the Rage and Violence, nor the Craft and Subtilty, of the Devil or Man shall ever be able to prevail against. This is the Sense which is given to this Passage by the most (b) ancient Interpreters; and which

(a) Πέτρων οἶμα παρ' αὐτοῦ ἕτερον ἔδεν, ἢ τὴν ἀκαταίσεις καὶ ἐδὲν τὰ τὴν τῆ μοῆσῃ πῖν ἀποκαλῶν ἐφ' ἣ ἔα ἀδιαπτῶτος ἐρήρειται τε καὶ ἀπὸ πῖπης ἢ ἐκκλησίας τῆ χρεῖς καὶ αὐταῖς ἀναλῶται ταῖς αὐτῶν ψύλαις ἐν ἀμύμῳ. Cyril. Alex. Dial. de Trinit. Lib. 4. c. 1.

Αὕτη ἡ ὁμολογία θεμέλιον εἶναι τῶν πισυνόντων. Theophylact. σὺν ἐπὶ τῷ Πέτρῳ ἔτι ὅτι ἐπὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῷ πῖν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀποδομῶσι — τί ἐν ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τῇ πέτρᾳ; ὁμολογία ἐπὶ τοῖς ῥήμασι. Chysof. Edit. Savil. Tom. 5. p. 979. (b) Origen Tract. 1. in Mat. Epiphanius Anchor. Chysof. hom. 55. Vide Maldonat. in loc.

Therefore I think we may safely adhere to, notwithstanding the Exceptions of the Learned *Grotius*, whose different Exposition of the Text, as he seems not to have been perfectly satisfied with it himself, there is the less Necessity to examine and refute.

In the words then thus explain'd are implied these two Propositions.

First, That the Church must in all Ages expect to be exercised with Trials and Opposition from the Gates of Hell, or *Powers of Darkness*.

Secondly, That how severe soever these Trials may be, or how great soever the Opposition it meets with, the Enemies of it shall never be able to effect its Destruction. *The Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.*

Before we proceed to consider the various Oppositions, in all Ages given to the Church, with the *Natural Causes*, and *Providential Ends* of them, it may be proper to premise, that, by the *Church*, I mean the Visible Church of Christ, in the Sense of our own Articles; which, agreeably to our Saviour's Promise, commenc'd upon

(a) He will have *ἄδης* here to signify (as it undoubtedly does in other Places of Holy Scripture) the State or Abode of Departed Spirits; and consequently by *πύλαι τῆς ἄδης* to be meant no more than *κράτος θανάτου*, the Power of Death, under which the faithful shall not be holden, in as much as they shall rise again at the last Day. Which Sense of the Words, (besides that by it the beautiful Allusion to two Contending Cities is utterly lost,) is evidently low and Jeune in Comparison of the other, and altogether unequal to the Importance of the Occasion of them. After all he concludes in this dissident Manner — *Nisi forte de Ecclesia agitur universim, non partitim, & ejus Perpetua Duratio promittitur* Grot. in loc.

the Preaching of St. *Peter*, immediately after the Descent of the Holy Ghost; and which by a daily increase, and uninterrupted Succession of Believers, hath continued to this day: and that, by the *Powers of Darknes* I beg leave to understand in general, whatever *Agents* are employ'd, and whatever *Methods* are made use of to advance the *Kingdom of Darknes*, i. e. to extirpate the Belief of the Gospel, and to set up instead thereof, Infidelity and Irreligion. So that there will be no Occasion, in the Prosecution of this Discourse, to distinguish between that Opposition which is properly the Work of Satan, and that which is effected by his Instruments; for as much as they both promote the same Cause, and are engag'd in the same Design: the Methods of effecting which may be reduced to these that follow;

First, Persecution;

Secondly, Heresies and Schisms;

Thirdly, Corruption of Principles and Manners.

The First of these, Persecution in the strictest Sense of it, seems to have been the peculiar Portion of the first Ages of the Church, which we find Struggling with the Secular Power, for near three Centuries together. And so terrible were its Conflicts of this kind, that when we look back upon those Scenes of Blood, we are at a loss which to admire as greater, the Cruelty and Inhumanity of the Persecutors, or the Faith, and Patience, and Constancy of the Martyrs.

They

they were indeed prepar'd to expect this bar-
 rous Treatment, by the Prediction of their
 Master, who had expressly told them,
 (a) *in the World they should have Tribulation,*
 that what he had suffered himself was an
 earnest of what they might expect to suffer.
The Disciple (saith he) *is not above the Lord,* if
they have persecuted me, they will also persecute You.
 It was it otherwise to be expected from the
 nature of Things. The Apostles themselves
 look'd upon as the most despicable Part of
 despised Nation: they were the Disciples of
 a Person, who, in his own Country, and at the
 instigation of his own Country Men, had suf-
 fered an ignominious Death as a Malefactor and
 a Seducer. They preach'd (c) *Christ Crucified, to*
Jews a Stumbling Block, and to the Greeks Foolish-
 They were to encounter the Prejudices of
 the Pagan World, and set up a *New Religion,*
 directly opposite to the Customs and Fashions
 of the World, and to the most prevailing Corruptions
 of Human Nature. Those who first embraced
 it were generally of the meanest and most igno-
 rant of the People. The Freedom they took in
 rejecting the Worship of the Heathen Gods
 made them look'd upon as *Atheists and Impious:*
 for refusing to pay the usual Honours to the
 Images and Statues of the Heathen Emperors,
 was construed to be an Act of Sedition and
 Rebellion against the State; and with regard
 to their *Personal Conduct,* they were consider'd

(a) John 16. 33. (b) John 15. 20. (c) 1 Cor. 1. 23.

as an *Obstinate Faction*, and calumniated as g
ty, in their private Meetings, of all Manner
Cruelty and Impurity. Add to this, that
Number of Hereticks, with which during
Period, the Church was most remarkably im
ed, (many of whom held the most ridicu
Absurdities, and practised and allow'd of
most detestable Vices, and who yet went un
the General Appellation of Christians,) c
tributed to the more easy Belief of these
lumnies, amongst such as would not be at
Pains to examine Things to the bottom,
distinguish between the true and false Pret
ers to that venerable Name. Upon these
many other Accounts, we are not to won
that the *first* Promulgers of the Gospel sh
meet with so very ill Reception; besides
it was agreeable to the Wisdom of God
give hereby a Confirmation of the Truth of
Religion, which so mightily grew and prev
notwithstanding this Opposition; and wh
destitute of all Human Support, spread it
in a wonderful Manner, to the utmost Part
the Earth, even in the midst of all that
and Violence, which was exerted for the
struction of it.

II. Another Method of Opposition, n
use of by the Great Enemy of Mankind to
stract the Church, is Heresies and Sch
(a) 'Tis the Observation of St. *Cyprian*, that

(a) Quid vero astutius, quidve subtilius, quam ut Chri
ventu detectus ac prostratus inimicus — videns ille idola de
& per nimium Credentium populum, sedes suas ac templac

the first owing to the Fraud and Subtility of Devil; who, when he saw his Temples forsaken, and his Worship neglected, and that he could not overthrow the Church by open Force, he recourse to this Stratagem, to disturb the Peace and break the Union of it. And of this Office he has serv'd himself in all Ages of the Church and in some of them but too successfully; nothing having contributed more to the Ruin of many once famous and flourishing Churches, than their fatal Divisions. And yet these Evils are no more than may be look'd upon in the Ordinary Course of Things; no more than by frequent Predictions in Scripture we were prepared to look for, and which by the Wisdom and Providence of God, are finally directed to, and made to serve together for the Glory of his Elect. (a) *There must be Heresies* (as St. Paul) *that they who are approv'd may be manifest.* So long as the Church is a Society of Men, and so long as Avarice and Ambition, Affectation of Novelty and Singularity, Self Love and Curiosity, have any Share in the Composition of Human Nature, (especially since there are Enemies from without, ever vigilant and industrious to cultivate and improve the Seeds of Dissention that are within us; and to foment the Divisions which are the Natural Consequences of these Corrupt Passions,)

averit novam fraudem, ut sub ipso Christiani nominis titulum latet incautos. Hereses invenit, & schismata, quibus sub nomine fidei, veritatem corrumperet, scinderet unitatem. Cyp. de Unitate Eccles. Edit. Oxon. p. 105. (a) 1 Cor. II. 19.

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'tis impossible but that Offences will come; *Seducers shall arise, deceiving and being deceiv'd*. But Wo only unto them by whom they do it, and to those who follow their pernicious Way. Even out of this Darknes there ariseth Light unto such as are true Hearted. *The approval hereby made manifest.* (a) These Trials, as they give to those who go through them with Satisfaction and Honour, the comfortable Evidences of their own Integrity; so do they, by Discovering the false and unstable Professors of the Truth, enable the Church to separate its Friends from its Enemies, and thereby in the most Effectual Manner to provide for its Security.

III. Another Method, by which the Enemies of the Church endeavour to subvert it, is by Corrupting Men's Principles and Debauching their Manners. And these have a natural and necessary Connection between each other. For as nothing has a more direct Tendency, to make Men live Licentious and Dissolute Lives, than to weaken or efface Religious Impressions, so they give them loose Notions of the Being and Attributes of God, the Necessity and Evidence of a Divine Revelation, the Eternal Difference between Good and Evil, the Immortality of the Soul, a Future Judgment, and the like; so

(a) Fieri vero hæc (Hereses) Dominus permittit & patitur, non nente propriæ libertatis arbitrio, ut dum Corda & mentes in veritatis discrimen examinat, probatorum fides integra maneat, luce clarescat — Sic probantur fideles, sic perfidi deteguntur & ante judicii diem hic quoque jam justorum atque injulorum animæ dividuntur & à frumento paleæ separantur. Cyp. de Unitate Ed. Ox. p. III.

the other Hand, nothing sooner brings them to all these Things into Question, or more indisposes and unqualifies them for a right Apprehension, and due Examination of them, than Sensuality and Looseness of Living. It may be hard to say which has the greater Influence, Inclivity to the making Men Immoral, or Immorality to make them Infidels. However, this is sadly evident, that a Spirit of Both reigns amongst us at this Time. For never surely was Christianity more strenuously opposed, or more shamefully insulted, since its first Establishment. No kind of Evidence which supports it has been left unattack'd. The *Prophecies* have been represented as Precarious, unintelligible, not pertinent to the Events, to the Completion whereof they have been applied --- the *Miracles* have been resolv'd into meer Figure and Allegory, that is into *meer Nothing*; and, under the Pretence of Advancing a Mystical Meaning of them, the Facts themselves, upon the *Reality* of which the Truth of Christianity manifestly depends, have been denied and ridiculed — The *internal Evidence* has been endeavour'd to be set aside, by asserting and publicly Maintaining, that Reason it self is a Sufficient Guide in Matters of Religion, and that a Revelation from God is either necessary or expedient for Mankind, nor consistent with the Immutability of the Divine Nature — And all this, with such a *Degree of Warmth and Earnestness*, as if the Adversaries of Religion really thought they were doing Service to Mankind, in disturbing and unsettling

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them in their most important Hopes, and depriving them of a Belief, upon which the Comfort and Happiness of their Life depends, and wherein the Peace and Order of Society is nearly concern'd: and at the same Time, after such a *Daring and petulant Manner*, as if they had forgotten that it was the Religion of the Country, or thought, that Blasphemies and Invectives against the *Divine Author* of it, were the only Abuses that a Christian Magistrate was not concern'd to Vindicate.

Now what can be the Reason, why, in this Enlighten'd Age, in a Country where the Gospel shines forth in its utmost Purity, and free from those Corruptions and Superstitions, which so much disguise and dishonour it in other places, where one would think it might receive some Advantage even from the Influences of Education, and the Establishment of it by the Civil Power, it should yet be treated with such Contempt and Hatred? That, Glorious as it is in itself, and Full and Clear in its Evidence, there should be found those amongst us, who *will not*, or (to speak of them in the most charitable manner) perhaps *Cannot* discern the Truth of it? What Account, I say, can be given of this Fatal Blindness, but that their Wills and Affections are totally perverted, and themselves in a State of Perdition? (a) *If our Gospel be* (saith the Apostle) *it is hid to them that are lost, whose Hearts the God of this World hath blinded*

(a) 2 Cor. 4. 3.

nd d *the Light of the Glorious Gospel of Christ, which*
 e Con *the Image of God, should shine upon them.*

ds, an And if a bare *Disbelief* of the Gospel be an Ar-
 y is gument, that, whatever Professions Men may
 e, aft make of their Sincerity and Love of Virtue,
 if th ey are secretly under the Influence and Do-
 f the minion of their Lusts and Passions, much more
 and I is a *Zeal and Forwardness to oppose it*: because
 c, we ery *Sincerely* Good Man, must, upon his own
 ate w inciples, be a *Well-wisher* at least to that Re-
 in th gion, which so visibly tends to the Improve-
 he G ment and Perfection of Human Nature, and to
 nd fr e Happiness of Mankind both here and here-
 , whi ter. For we may appeal to the Great Advo-
 er p tes of Natural Religion in Opposition to Re-
 recei lation, if they are really the Friends to Moral
 nces rtue they would be thought, whether they
 by t n meet with so fair a Transcript of it in any
 th fu her Book as in the Book of God? Is the
 as it actice of it any where enjoyn'd and inforced
 iden on higher Motives, or for nobler Ends, or
 s, w greater Degrees of Perfection, than in the
 t cha Gospel of Christ? If not, why do they treat it
 Tru th Despite and Obloquy? Why do they make
 ven their Business to catch at every Handle of Ca-
 lls a and Exception, to bring into Discredit an
 nself titution, which, in the whole Aim and De-
 ? be te of it, is most excellently adapted to pro-
 are t te that Piety, and Sobriety, that Universal
 blind ghteousness, and Benevolence, which *them-*
 es Profess to Admire and Recommend? Can
 y in earnest believe, that these Virtues would
 more generally practised, if the Additional

Inforcements, which the Gospel gives to the own Reasonableness and Excellency, were *afide*? or, that the Nature of them would be more generally understood, if every one was left solely to the Dictates of his own Judgement and Understanding concerning them, than now when there is an Order of Men whose Office is, and who by their Education and Engagements are both qualified and oblig'd, to explain and inculcate them? No certainly; this fierce and restless Opposition against an Institution so graciously adapted to the Necessities and Infirmities of Mankind, that lays down the most perfect Precepts, and enforces them with the most powerful Sanctions, can be resolv'd into nothing else but the Essential Difference between its pure and Spiritual Nature, and the Deprav'd Appetite of Flesh and Blood --- Unless we may suppose what the Spirit and Temper of some Men would incline us to believe, that the *Temporal Advantages* annex'd to the Priesthood have some Share in the *Causes* of this notorious Disaffection, and that the Gospel itself fares the worse, for the sake of that Distinction, with which the Ministers of it, in a Christian Government, are, and ought to be, treated. Be that as it will, the *Effect* is still the same. We may say with St. Paul (a) *as he that was born after the Flesh, persecutes him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now* From which Words I cannot but observe, how justly we may retort the Charge of Persecution

on the Infidels of the Age, who are apt so
 edly to complain of even the Gentlest Ani-
 versions of the Civil Magistrate upon their
 violent Treatment of Christ and his Gospel.
 That it was which the Apostle here calls Perse-
 cution we may learn *Gen. 21. 9. And Sarah saw*
the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born
to Abraham, Mocking: By which the (a) Je-
 shu Writers upon the Place understand a Rude
 and Contumelious Behaviour of *Ishmael* towards
 Isaac, upon the Account of his Piety. If Mock-
 ing be, in the Judgment of the Apostle, a Perse-
 cution, what shall we say to that Reproach and
 derision, those Scoffs and Insults, with which
 the Christian Cause, and the Venerable Defend-
 ers of it, have of late been so plentifully treat-
 ed? Our Adversaries cannot but know, indu-
 bitable as they are to gain Profelytes, and great
 the Licentiousness of the Times is, that there
 are yet great Numbers, and those of the best
 and wisest Sort, who are firmly perswaded that
 the Christian Religion is from God, and who
 regulate their Lives and Practice by it. And is
 there no Grievance, no Outrage done to Such, that
 the blessed *Jesus and his Mighty Works* are become
 the Object of Publick Ridicule? May we not
 allow'd to be Jealous for the Honour of our
 Lord and Saviour? and can we, if we are so, be-
 hold, without the most sensible Concern, the In-
 juries which are daily offer'd him? Do not
 these Arrows, the bitter Words which the wick-

(a) Vid. Grot. in loc.

ed shoot against Him, stick fast in the Heart ev'ry True Believer? Have we no Interest in the Religion which we profess, and upon which we think our whole Happiness depends? And if we, if we have, behold, without the most afflictive Sorrow, the Advances which are daily made to subvert and destroy it? This certainly is one Sort of Persecution; and in some respects more formidable than that of Fire and Sword, as it more imminently threatens the Subversion of Christianity, by corrupting the Understandings of Men, and betraying them into Infidelity, under the Specious Names of Liberty and Reason. So truly do these Seducers answer the Character given of them by the Apostle, that they should be *(a) Presumptuous, self-willed, afraid to speak evil of Dignities, speaking proud swelling words of Vanity, promising men Liberty whilst themselves are the Servants of Corruption.*

Having thus considered the Trials and Oppression which the Church of Christ hath hitherto been, and shall continue to be, exercised with, let us proceed to the second Thing observable from the Text, viz. that the Enemies of it, shall never be able to effect its Destruction; it shall still prevail against, and finally be Triumphant over them.

It has already been in some Measure observed to the Honour of God's Wisdom and Providence, how easily he overrules the Counsels of his Enemies, and *(b)* makes those very Devices

(a) 2 Pet. 2. 10. *(b)* Hæreticorum quippe inquietudine ut Scripturas vigilantius perscrutemur, unde ne ovili Christi noceant, per-

which intend the Destruction of the Church, a
 means to Strengthen and Establish it. Thus the
 blood of the Martyrs was, as it has often been
 styled, the Seed of the Church. So far
 are the Numbers of the Faithful from being
 diminished, by the Havock that was made of
 them, that they increased in Proportion to the
 severities that were laid upon them, and like
 the *Israelites in Egypt, the more they were afflicted,*
more they multiplied. Thus also, to those Va-
 rious Oppositions which have been given to the
 Truth, in the several Ages of the Church, it is
 owing, that the (a) Doctrines of it have been
 more attentively consider'd, more clearly under-
 stood, more strongly supported, more earnestly
 teach'd, and by these means, in the Event,
 more fully establish'd than they were before.
 And raises up, according to the Exigencies of
 the Church, able Champions of the Truth, and
 inspires them with Zeal, and Wisdom, and
 courage, to maintain it. Of which, blessed be
 his Name, he hath not in this Age *left himself*
without Witness, for as Christianity was never
 more vigorously opposed, so never was it more
 vigorously defended. Those bold and open Attacks

et occuri, tanquam de somno ignavia nostra excitatur indu-
 citur ita per multiplicem gratiam Salvatoris, etiam quod inimi-
 ci perniciem machinatur, Deus convertit in adiutorium. Aug.
 7. Confess. cap. 19. (a) Multa quippe ad fidem Catholicam
 presentia dum Hæreticorum callida inquietudine agitantur, ut
 minus eos defendi possint, & considerantur diligentius, & intel-
 liguntur clarius, & instantius prædicantur, & ab adversario mota
 ratio discendi existit occasio. Aug. de Civitate Dei. Lib. 16. cap.
 17. Par. p. 973. Tom. 5.

which

which have been made upon it by Infidels and Apostates, having Providentially had this happy Consequence, that they have produced some of the noblest and most excellent Apologies that have appear'd in any Age or Country, in behalf of it: Such solid and substantial Arguments of its divine Authority, such full and satisfactory Answers to every Cavil and Objection that has been rais'd against it, as, in the Judgment of all considering Men, must end in the Confusion at least, if not in the Conviction, of the Opposers; and will be standing Evidences of the Power and Prevalence of Truth, which shines the brighter, for being tried, and the more it is shaken, the more firmly it is root-

And what God hath already done for his Church, there is rational Ground to hope he will still continue to do for it. As his Power and Goodness are always the Same, 'tis a Strong Presumption of his Future Protection, that he hath hitherto so eminently preserv'd it, amidst all the Storms to which it has been exposed. But we are not left to rest upon Presumptive Arguments. — *We have a more sure word of Prophecy, even his Gracious Promise, and Eternal Truth engag'd for the Performance of it. "Upon this Rock will I build my Church and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."* And this a Promise not once only, or incidentally made, but repeated upon the most solemn Occasions. 'Tis worthy of Observation, that as the Promise of Perpetuity in the Text, was made by Christ to his Apostles, upon their *First* General

unanimous Recognition of his Person and Office, so was it again confirm'd to them upon his giving them their *Final Commission*: when, having commanded them to (a) *Go and teach all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, he concludes with his Comfortable Assurance of his Continual presence, *Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the World*. To the same Effect he had before promised them the *Perpetual Guidance and Assistance* of the Holy Spirit in his Stead, when to support them under the Melancholy thoughts of his Departure from them, he tells them, (b) *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you ever*. And what greater Certainty can we have of the Indefeetibility of Christ's Church, than from these Repeated Declarations of it which Christ himself hath given us? That He, whom *all Power is given in Heaven and in Earth*, hath solemnly undertaken its Preservation and Defence? that He, who *loved the Church and gave himself for it*, is continually Present with it, to assist and succour it in all Dangers and Adversities? Vain then and insignificant are the Efforts of sinful Men, to overthrow what is upheld by an Almighty Arm! What a Implication is there of Folly and Madness in the Attempt? the painful Folly of *kicking against Pricks*, and the impious Madness of *Fighting against God*! For (c) *if this Counsel or this Work*

(a) Matt. 28. 19. (b) John 14. 16. (c) Acts 5. 38.

had been of Men, it would, as Gamaliel wisely argued, long since have come to nought; it must inevitably have sunk under those Pressures and Discouragements which lay so heavy upon when Earth and Hell conspired to crush it in Beginning. To what then was owing the Marvellous Propagation and Establishment of it, but to that Supernatural Assistance, which, in Virtue of Christ's Promise, visibly went along with and shew'd, that nothing less than the Hand of God was in it. Accordingly the Triumphs of Christianity over the Pagan Idolatry and Superstition, and the Immediate Efficacy of God's Power, and Wisdom, and Love to his Church in the Accomplishment of that Great Event, may aptly be represented in those Words of the Psalm wherein he celebrates the Conquest of the Land of Canaan by the Israelites. (a) We have heard with our Ears, O God, our Fathers have told us, what thou hast done in their time of old; how thou hast driven out the Heathen with thy hand, and planted them in; how thou hast destroy'd the Nations and cast them out. For they gat not the land in possession thro' their own Sword, neither was it their own Arm that helped them; but thy right hand, and thine Arm, and the Light of thy Countenance, because thou hast a Favour unto them.

For what Reasons God thought fit to suffer a sudden Stop to be put to the Victorious Progress of the Gospel, and the Knowledge of it to be extinguished in some Places where it had been

(a) Psal. 44. 1.

establiſh'd, muſt be left to the ſecret Counſels of his Providence, which it becomes us not too curiouſly to enquire into, or preſumptuouſly to determine. But ſince there are numerous Paſſages in the Prophets, containing Promiſes to the Church, of much greater Peace, and Perfection, and Enlargement, than it hath hitherto enjoy'd, we have all the Reason in the World to reſt aſſured, that theſe Promiſes will, in God's due Time, be made Good, and that the Exiſtence of the Church, even in the loweſt and moſt declining State of it, is a Pledge of the performance of them. For this is that *everlaſting Kingdom*, ſpoken of by the Prophet (a) *Daniel*, which *the God of Heaven hath ſet up, and which ſhall never be deſtroj'd*. This is that *City of the Lord of Hoſts, the City of our God, which God hath hitherto eſtabliſh'd, yea and will eſtabliſh for ever*. This is that Church, which is built upon the *Rock of Ages*, and whoſe Duration ſhall be Commenſurate to the Eternity of its Founder. — That Church, which, during its Continuance here on Earth, may, as (b) *St. Chryſoſtom* elegantly ſpeaks, *be attack'd, but not defeated; ſiſ'd, but not ſhipwreck'd; ſtruck at, but not wound- ed; assaulted, but not overthrown*.

But here we muſt be careful to remember, that theſe Promiſes of Perpetuity and Protection are to be underſtood only of the Catho-

(a) Dan. 7. 27. 2. 44. (b) Χειρίζεται ἡ ἐκκλησία, ἀλλ' ἡ κατὰ-
 τὴν ἐκκλησίαν κλυδωνίζεται, ἀλλ' ἡ γίνεται ὑποβρύχιος· δέχεται βίαν, ἀλλ' ἡ
 οὐ γίνεται Τραύματα· δέχεται μηχανήματα, ἀλλ' ὁ πύργος ἡ σιλοῦνται. Χρυσ.
 πατρ. ἀμφιθ. ἐν τῇ πνευματικῇ. Edit. Sav. Tom. 5. p. 979.

lick Church in general, and not of this or the particular Branch of it. Particular Churches both may, and have utterly fail'd. Witness those once flourishing Churches in *Asia* and *Africa*, so gloriously heretofore enlighten'd with the Saving Truths of the Gospel, which are now become the Seat of Ignorance, Barbarism and Mahometanism. Terrible Monuments of God's Vengeance upon those who walk unworthily of his Gospel! and sufficient Warnings on which would think to others, to detest those Vices which brought down this Heavy Judgment upon them, and provoked Him to *remove his Candlestick out of its place*. For when, by Unfruitfulness under the Means of Grace, and a Contempt of God's Holy Word and Ordinances, People are become ripe for the Sentence of Excommunication, no wonder that *the Kingdom of God is taken from them, and given to a Nation bringing forth the Fruits thereof*. Let those, who are so industrious to propagate Infidelity, consider this and withal, what Reason their Posterity will have to *Curse their saying*, should God, in his Justice, punish their wicked Blasphemies in the manner they deserve, and take away that Light which they wilfully shut their Eyes against. Tho' God hath promised that he will never be without a Church upon Earth, he has no where promised, nor have we reason to expect, that we of this Kingdom and Nation shall be always Members of it. (a) *As we, which in time past were*

(a) 1 Pet. 2. 10.

or the people, are now the People of God; so a Time
 Church may come, when we shall be no longer a Peo-
 Witne, but (a) he shall be found of them that now seek
 and ask not, and be made manifest to them that ask not
 him. As therefore, on the one Hand,
 there is Incouragement to Hope, and to invigo-
 barize us in the common Cause and Defence of
 Religion; so, on the other Hand, here is
 danger enough to put us upon our Guard, and
 excite our Diligence in the Use and Applica-
 tion of all those Means which may conduce to
 the Preservation of it. Some of these I beg
 to briefly to take notice of, by Way of Appli-
 cation. And

First in general, the Strong Opposition, which
 is given at this Time to the Gospel, should excite
 us to adorn the Profession of it with an Holy
 Conversation, that the Enemy may have no
 occasion to Blaspheme, but that, if possible,
 we may be reconciled to better Thoughts of
 Christianity, from the Influence which they
 will observe it to have upon our Lives. The
 Ministers of the Gospel have not been wanting
 in the Spirit of Meekness, as becometh their Of-
 fice, to give an Answer to these Gainfayers, and
 to reason of the Faith and Hope that is in them:
 but has the Magistrate denied the Assistance of
 Civil Power, to correct the Insolence of the
 Sinner and Blasphemer: But there is still some-
 thing more requir'd, something incumbent up-
 on every one of us, to vindicate the Honour of

(a) Rom. 10. 20.

our Holy Religion, in which the Laity are equally concern'd with the Clergy, the People with the Magistrate. Were the Lives of Christians but agreeable to the Precepts of Christianity, with what Face could Men object against an Institution, the *Visible Fruits* of which would then be, (as, in the whole Aim and Design of it is evidently calculated for,) the Advancement of true Religion, and the Happiness of Society and Private Life? when, convinced by the exemplary Piety and Purity of our Behaviour, they should be forc'd to acknowledge that *to be a Christian* is a truly Great and Glorious Character; and that a Faithful and Humble Following of the Holy Jesus takes an easier and more certain Way to the Perfection of Virtue, than to be met with in all that ever was written by the most Celebrated Philosophers. But whatever Effect a true Christian Deportment may have upon *others*, we shall certainly reap infinite Advantage from it *ourselves*, upon this, as well as many other Accounts, that we shall hereby be preserv'd from one of the greatest Temptations to Infidelity, I mean, *Evil Habits*: for I believe it may be laid down as an undoubted Truth, that no Man, having once embraced the Christian Religion, ever went about to persuade himself, or others, that it was not true, till he had made Shipwreck of a Good Conscience, and lost Reason to *wish* it was not true.

Secondly and more particularly, from the Proposition given to the Gospel, I would take Occasion to recommend a Spirit of Brotherly Love

Unity; Duties at all Times amiable, but in
 Times of Danger absolutely necessary. A
 broken and divided Enemy becomes an easy
 conquest. Let us not therefore by our Dis-
 sensions and Dissensions furnish our Adversaries
 with Advantages against us. Let us not, whilst
 we are attacking each other with intemperate
 zeal, in Disputes of little Concernment, open
 Way for the *Common Enemy* to destroy the ve-
 ritable Vitals and Essence of our Religion. The Fa-
 tal Consequence of Divisions amongst Chri-
 stians is too well known to need to be enlarg'd
 upon: the Reason of it may perhaps deserve
 to be more duly consider'd, and it seems to be
 this; That, as every Society is weaken'd by a
 division of its Members, much more so must
 the Society of Christians, because every Viola-
 tion of Charity amongst Such, is a Violation of
 that which is the *Bond of Christian Perfection*.
 Thirdly, the Opposition given to the Gospel
 should more especially excite us, my Brethren,
 whom God hath call'd to be the Ministers of it,
 to a diligent Attendance upon the Duties of our
 respective Stations. — With regard to *our selves* ;
 that, by a Holy Life, a Prudent and unblameable
 conduct, we may be *Examples to the Believers*,
 and *Patterns of Good Works* ; and by giving Atten-
 tion to *Reading, to Exhortation, to Doctrine*, we
 may add to *our Faith Knowledge*, and be found
 able, by the Spirit of Wisdom, to defeat the
 crafty Wilefulness of those who lie in wait to deceive.
 With regard to *our Flocks* ; that we be assiduous
 in Warning them of the Danger, and Guarding
 them

them from the Attacks of Unbelievers; that endeavour to make them sensible what a *Blessed* Christianity is, and solicitous to transmit it such to their Posterity; that they may not look upon it as an Arbitrary or unnecessary Impostition, but as (what in Truth it is) *the Wisdom of God unto Salvation*.

If it became me to suggest any particular Method of doing this with Success, it should be to make the Gospel Oeconomy, the Great Work of our Redemption and the Benefits we receive thereby, the Necessity of a Mediator, the Merits and Intercession of Christ, with other *properly Christian* Topicks, the frequent Subjects of our Popular Discourses. He, who looks upon the Gospel, only as the Declaration of God's Will to Mankind in point of *Moral Duty*, is far from viewing it in its utmost Excellency and Perfection. It is undoubtedly, even in that single View, the most exalted System of Virtue and Goodness that ever appear'd in the World; but to him, who considers it *further*, as conveying to him the Knowledge of the great Mysteries of God's Dispensations towards Mankind, in the Redemption of them by his Son, and Sanctification by his Holy Spirit, as containing the Promises of Adoption and Eternal Life, prescribing the Means of Grace and Terms of Reconciliation; to him, I say, who views it in this Light, and makes it the Subject of his Meditation, with that Seriousness, Humility and Attention which becomes him, how Wonderful does it appear in its Discoveries! how Sublime

that Important in its Matter! how Glorious in
 a Blessing Rewards! how Comfortable in its Promises!
 nit it how Gracious in its Offers! how Powerful in its
 not lofluence!

Fourthly and Lastly, as the Assurance which
 Christ hath given us that his Church shall never
 be dissolved, should be Matter of Comfort and Support
 to us, in any outward Distress that may befall it;
 in Danger that may threaten it; so ought it
 to quicken our Faith and Confidence in our
 Addresses to the Throne of Grace for the Safe-
 ty and Preservation of it. We can never put up
 our Petitions with better Hopes of Success, than
 when we know, that what we ask is not only
 agreeable to God's Will, but expressly ascertain'd
 to us by his most true Promise.

Let us therefore Conclude all, with offering
 to God our most fervent Prayers for the Con-
 tinuance and Increase of his Faith and true Re-
 volution amongst us, in the Words of our most ex-
 cellent Liturgy,

O Lord, we beseech thee, let thy Continual
 Mercy cleanse and defend thy Church, and because
 it cannot continue in Safety without thy Suc-
 cour, preserve it evermore by thy Help and
 Goodness; that, thro' thy Protection, it may be
 free from all Adversities, and devoutly given to
 serve thee in all Good Works, to the Glory of
 thy Name, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom

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et, dum incipias, gravia sunt, dumque ignores; ubi cognoris, facilia. Ter. Heaut.

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